



# **SOCIAL MEDIA & ELECTRONIC** **COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

[www.greathorkesley-pc.gov.uk](http://www.greathorkesley-pc.gov.uk)

*This Policy will be reviewed annually by Full Council.*

*Adopted: Full Council Meeting 19<sup>th</sup> March 2024 Minute Ref: 23/146 (b)*

*Reviewed:*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables Great Horkesley Parish Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and between the Council and the people, businesses, and agencies it works with and serves.

The Council has a website and Facebook page and uses email, text messages and WhatsApp to communicate. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the Council may add to its channels of communication as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur, this policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

## **GENERAL COMMUNICATIONS**

All communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful, and relevant.
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented, or racially offensive.
- Not contain content which is suspected to be copyrighted, without the consent of the copyright owner.
- Not contain any personal information.
- If it is official Council business, it will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council or Committee, or the Clerk to the Council.
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to find required information, or we may forward questions to the Chairman or another Councillor for consideration and response.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

The Council Facebook page intends to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our village and promote our community positively. Only the Clerk to the Council can publish posts on the Facebook page.

In order to ensure that discussions on the Council's Facebook page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask that anyone commenting on posts follows these guidelines:

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including Council members or staff, will not be tolerated.
- Be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.

- Stay on topic.
- Refrain from using the Facebook page for commercial purposes or to advertise, market or sell products.

The Facebook page is not monitored 24/7 and the Clerk is not always able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities. Please do not include personal or private information in your social media comments or messages to us.

Sending a message via social media will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the Council's Clerk or Chairman by email.

We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- Obscene or racist content.
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language.
- Potentially libellous statements.
- Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright.
- Private or personal information published without consent.
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum.
- Commercial promotions or spam.
- Breaches of a Council's policy or the law.

The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria, will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy, or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given our limited resources available. Any information posted on the Facebook page not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from commenting on the Facebook page and reported to the relevant authority.

## **PARISH COUNCIL WEBSITE**

The purpose of the Council's website is to provide information about the Council, the Village Hall and the local area that is accessible 24/7. Information such as financial documents, and agendas and minutes of meetings, are also displayed to ensure the Council remains to be transparent.

The Council may, at its discretion, allow and enable approved local groups to have a presence on its website for the purpose of presenting information about the group's activities. The Council reserves the right to remove any or all of a local group's information from the website.

## **PARISH COUNCIL EMAILS**

The Clerk to the Council has their own email address (parish-clerk@greathorkesley-pc.gov.uk).

The email account is monitored regularly, and the Clerk aims to reply to questions as soon as possible, usually within 48 hours Monday to Friday. An 'out of office' message will be used when appropriate.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with emails received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk or otherwise will be copied to the Clerk. All new emails requiring personal data to be passed on, will be followed up either by asking for written permission to forward that data or with a data consent form for completion, before action is taken with that correspondence.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with members of the public and if appropriate, copy emails to the Clerk. Any emails copied to the Clerk are considered official emails and will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept, in accordance with the Council's Document Retention & Disposal Policy.

Councillors and staff must not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council. This includes names, addresses, emails, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

## **SMS, TEXTING & WHATSAPP**

Members and staff may use SMS, texting, or WhatsApp as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

## **CODE OF CONDUCT & DATA PROTECTION ACT**

Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the Council.

As more and more information becomes available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

Members should also be careful only to 'cc' essential recipients on emails, take care that emails are sent to the correct recipients, and ensure that any unnecessary email trails have been removed.